

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4304
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 0481

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SHUM, GY
SUBJECT: FONMIN WILLS' REMARKS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: (A) GEORGETOWN 0444, (B) GEORGETOWN A-12

SUMMARY: THE GOG APPEARS TO BE ATTEMPTING TO CULTIVATE THE EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY IN PREPARATION FOR THE 1978 ELECTION. SEVERAL RECENT GOG GESTURES POINT TO THIS. MOST RECENT WAS ADDRESS BY FONMIN WILLS TO ISLAMIC COMMUNITY REITERATING GOG COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS. HIS SPEECH ALSO WAS PROBABLY INTENDED TO SHOW USG THAT GUYANA IS IN LINE WITH USG POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS. ACCORDING RUMORS, AND DIRECT HINTS BY WILLS TO US, BURNHAM INTENDS FOR HIM TO BUILD A BRIDGE BETWEEN GOG AND EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY BEFORE 1978 ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. IN AN ADDRESS MARCH 3 TO UNITED SADR ISLAMIC ANJUMAN, A PREDOMINANTLY EAST INDIAN AUDIENCE, FOREIGN AND JUSTICE MINISTER WILLS EMPHASIZED HIS GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO
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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. DECLARING THAT FREEDOM OF WORSHIP IS GUARANTEED BY LAW AND BY POLITICAL PRACTICE, WILLS NOTED THAT THERE WERE NO POLITICAL PRISONERS IN GUYANA AND THAT NO ONE HAD EVER BEEN PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. IN CONNECTION WITH THIS ADDRESS, WILLS TOLD CHARGE THAT PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM RECENTLY DESIGNATED HIM IN PRESENCE OF DEPUTY PM REID TO SERVE AS A BRIDGE TO EAST

INDIAN COMMUNITY.

2. COMMENT: THE GOG HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED TO MAKE EFFORT TO IMPROVE ITS RELATIONS WITH EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY BY STRESSING ITS COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS. RATIFICATION OF THREE UN CONVENTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTLY IN RESPONSE TO CRITICISM BY PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP) AND WILLS' DECISION TO ORDER A SPEEDY RETRIAL FOR PPP ACTIVIST ARNOLD RAMPERSAUD (REF B) APPEAR TO BE PART OF GOG EFFORT TO EASE TENSION IN GUYANA AND TO PLACE GOG IN LINE WITH US EMPHASIS ON PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

3. ACCORDING TO RUMORS, PERHAPS DELIBERATELY CIRCULATED BY GOG AND BY WILLS' OWN ADMISSION, WILLS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED BY BURNHAM TO BE THE PNC'S SPEARHEAD IN HEALING BREACH BETWEEN GOG AND EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY PRIOR TO 1978 ELECTIONS. AS WILLS IS NOT TAINTED BY PAST RACIAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS THE VIOLENCE OF THE EARLY 1960'S, HE IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE BEST SUITED AMONG TOP GOG LEADERS TO COURT EAST INDIANS. ALTHOUGH EAST INDIAN COMMUNITY COMPRISES 52 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION AND IS OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSED TO BURNHAM REGIME, IT HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY LACK OF WELL-ORGANIZED MODERATE LEADERSHIP, AND HAS PROVIDED LUKEWARM SUPPORT TO THE MARXIST/LENINIST OPPOSITION LEADER, CHEDDI JAGAN. IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR BURNHAM'S REGIME TO GAIN ANY SUPPORT FROM MASS OF EAST INDIANS UNLESS VIGOROUS STEPS ARE TAKEN TO END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST EAST INDIANS IN CIVIL SERVICE AND MILITARY. WE DOUBT THAT THE GOG WILL OR COULD TAKE THE NECESSARY MEASURES TO ACCOMPLISH THIS

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PRIOR TO 1978 ELECTIONS. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

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